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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

1 February 1951

SUBJECT: NIE-9: TURKEY'S POSITION IN THE EAST-WEST STRUGGLE
(For consideration by IAC Representatives)

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the will and ability of Turkey to maintain its alignment with the West, and the courses of action Turkey might follow in the event of war.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Turkey is solidly aligned with the West because this alignment offers Turkey its only hope of effectively resisting Soviet pressures. At present the primary objective of Turkish foreign policy is to secure continued US assistance and, if possible, a clear-cut US commitment to come to Turkey's defense in the event of war.

2. New Soviet or Soviet-satellite successes in expanding the Communist sphere of control would not significantly alter Turkey's alignment as long as the US demonstrated that its fundamental aim was to continue the struggle against the USSR.

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3. Turkey would probably abandon its pro-US alignment only if the US failed to prevent Soviet occupation or control of Greece and refused to consider a Soviet or satellite attack on Greece sufficient justification for US declaration of war against the USSR. In this circumstance, Turkey would virtually be cut off from the West and would attempt to adopt a neutralist policy.

4. We believe Turkey is capable of halting an invasion by Bulgarian forces at the Straits. Against a Soviet attack, the Turks probably could maintain organized resistance for two or three months, and perhaps -- with substantial Western assistance -- could hold a redoubt area in Southern Turkey against Soviet forces.

5. Turkey would resist aggression against itself. It would probably continue to support concerted Western action under UN auspices in opposition to Soviet or satellite aggression elsewhere. In the event of general war, Turkey, if not itself attacked, probably would initially maintain a non-belligerent status but would do everything compatible with that status to facilitate a Western victory.

DISCUSSION

THE SOLIDITY OF TURKEY'S PRO-WESTERN ALIGNMENT

1. Short of major Western reverses in the Near East at the hands of the USSR or a US retreat into hemispheric

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isolationism, Turkey will remain solidly aligned with the West. The Turks are determined to preserve the independence of Turkey and consider that alignment with the US and its allies offers Turkey its only hope of effectively resisting Soviet pressures, which since the end of World War II have been far more severe than the pressures to which Turkey was traditionally subjected by Czarist Russia. The USSR has demanded a share in control of the Straits and the right to station Soviet troops there. It has claimed the Kars plateau area in northeastern Turkey, not only because it has traditionally contested control of this area with Turkey but also because the establishment of air bases there would threaten vital areas in the USSR. Moreover, the USSR has permitted its propagandists to denounce the Turkish regime, vilify Turkish leaders, attack Turkey's close association with the US, and attempt to incite revolt against the Turkish Government. Turkey believes that this pressure constitutes so great a threat to its national security and independence that it has abandoned its traditional policy of balancing one great power against another and has fully aligned itself with the West.

2. The Turks have stood firm against Soviet and satellite pressure. They have avoided hasty or provocative actions against the USSR, and have indicated a willingness to

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discuss points at issue with the USSR. At the same time, however, they have made it clear that they are strongly averse to a policy of appeasement and are determined to resist any Soviet attempts to encroach on Turkey's independence and territorial integrity. Moreover, they have sought to ally themselves with the power or combination of powers most capable of resisting the USSR.

3. At present the primary objective of Turkey's foreign policy is to obtain a US commitment to come to Turkey's defense in event of a Soviet or Soviet-satellite attack. Pronouncements of US interest in Turkey's security and the extension of US military and economic assistance have given the Turks a large measure of assurance, but they are still deeply concerned by the lack of a formal guarantee of prompt and effective aid in the event of war. The Turks would almost certainly provide base facilities to the US in return for a definite US commitment to come to Turkey's defense. Having failed to obtain a firm US commitment to date, the Turks have sought to obtain indirect US guarantees by seeking membership in NATO or by forming an Eastern Mediterranean security pact with direct US participation. To the Turks, limited association with the NATO for Mediterranean defense planning represents only a slight improvement over their previous

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situation. They consider that the formation of a Mediterranean bloc without US participation or the conclusion of mutual assistance agreements with their neighbors might actually be disadvantageous and have, therefore, firmly opposed them. While they have reaffirmed their adherence to the 1939 Tripartite Treaty of mutual assistance with France and the UK, they clearly value it less as a direct guarantee of British and French assistance than as potentially an indirect way of getting US assistance. Turkey's participation in the UN is animated by the same motives. Turkey is more willing than most members to make the UN effective but has little confidence in its present effectiveness.

POSSIBILITIES OF A SHIFT IN TURKEY'S ALIGNMENT

4. With each cold war reverse and each isolated Soviet or satellite aggression, Turkish demands for a firm US commitment would become more insistent and ultimately would become a condition for Turkey's continued alignment with the West. The Turks expect the West to suffer further diplomatic or military reverses, but believe that the US and its allies will be able ultimately to contain Soviet imperialism or defeat the USSR in event of war. A reduction in the US power position as a result of further reverses in the cold war

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would not alter Turkey's basic alignment as long as the US continued to oppose Soviet imperialism. Even if the US failed to prevent Soviet occupation or control of Yugoslavia or Iran and refused to consider Soviet or satellite attacks against those countries as sufficient justification for US attacks on the USSR, Turkey would probably maintain its pro-US alignment. On the other hand, if the US failed to prevent Soviet occupation or control of Greece and refused to consider a Soviet or satellite attack on Greece sufficient justification for US declaration of war on the USSR, Turkey probably would attempt to adopt a neutralist policy in the East-West struggle.

5. Even if Turkey became separated from the West in this way, the Turks would continue to resist Soviet pressure. In time, a body of opinion favoring appeasement and accommodation with the USSR would grow up and might eventually dominate Turkish policy, but at present it appears more likely that the Turks would continue to resist Soviet pressure and — if necessary — fight for their independence, no matter how suicidal such a course might be.

THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF TURKEY'S POSITION

6. Turkey is one of the strongest anti-Communist countries on the periphery of the USSR and the only one in the

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Near East capable of offering substantial resistance to Soviet aggression.

(a) Turkey's strength derives to a considerable extent from the national unity and homogeneity of its population, 95 percent of which is ethnically Turkish. In spite of Turkey's low standard of living and occasional bitter controversy over internal issues, the great majority of the Turkish people are united in their opposition to Communism and fully support the Government's policy of aligning Turkey with the Western powers. Elements of the Kurdish, Greek, and Armenian minorities and even some Turks might be susceptible to Communist subversion if internal security broke down, but such a development is likely to occur only as a result of a Soviet invasion. Turkey's political institutions and relatively free press constitute sufficient outlets for what little disaffection exists, and subversion is effectively controlled by the Turkish security services. At the same time the extension of democratic procedures is building a stronger base for Turkish national power.

(b) Another major source of Turkish strength is its army. With US aid the Turkish Army has recently developed into a compact, mobile force of about 280,000 men. It has

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a theoretical mobilization potential of 1,500,000 men, although it could not equip or provide logistic support for this number. While the full-scale reorganization of Turkey's defense establishment envisaged in the US military aid program is not scheduled to be completed until the summer of 1951, the combat effectiveness of the armed forces has already increased considerably despite the temporary dislocations inherent in converting from old to new methods, weapons, and equipment.

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7. Turkey's position is weak in the following respects.

(a) In spite of major improvements made possible by the US military and economic aid programs, the Turkish armed forces lack detailed war and mobilization plans, have inadequate supply services, are critically short of technically qualified NCO's, and lack an effective air force.

(b) A more fundamental weakness is the inability of Turkey's economy to support unaided Turkey's heavy defense burden. Since the economy is largely agricultural rather than industrial, Turkey is heavily dependent on outside supplies both for consumer goods and military materiel. The necessity of maintaining large defense forces, to which about 35% of the current budget is devoted, severely limits industrial development and prevents any appreciable increase in Turkey's low standard of living. Its lack of industrial development has also limited the number of citizens who are trained in using and maintaining mechanized equipment.

(c) Turkey's greatest weakness is its geographical position on the Soviet periphery, far from Western centers of strength, and flanked on the east and south by countries that are extremely vulnerable to Soviet aggression. Large Soviet and/or satellite forces could be hurled against Turkey with little or no warning. As the avenues of Soviet/satellite land attack from the Balkans and the Caucasus are widely separated, in event of war Turkey would be forced to split its limited

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resources and fight on two fronts without good inter-connecting transportation facilities. Furthermore, its entire Black Sea coast is open to amphibious attack because of the weakness of its Air Force and Navy.

8. In spite of the shortcomings of its armed forces, economic weaknesses, and its geographical vulnerability, Turkey is capable of putting up considerable resistance to Soviet or satellite aggression. We believe it is capable of halting a Bulgarian invasion at the Straits and possibly even at the prepared defenses in eastern Thrace. Against a Soviet attack, Turkey is believed capable of delaying Soviet advances into the interior of the country by stubborn defensive fighting. The Turkish armed forces could probably maintain some form of organized resistance for two or three months and might even hold a redoubt area in southern Turkey for some time if they received substantial assistance from the Western powers. In the latter case, the Turks probably could also maintain guerrilla warfare against Soviet lines of communication.

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF TURKEY

9. The alignment of Turkey with the West is of primary strategic importance because of Turkey's political and military strength and its geographical position. Turkey adjoins Soviet

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and Soviet satellite territories and lies across the line of Soviet penetration into the weak and unstable countries of the Middle East. Since Turkey is politically stable and has relatively strong armed forces, it is a major obstacle to Soviet advances in the Middle East. Furthermore, Turkey's pro-US alignment, in conjunction with its military strength, tends to deter the USSR from attacking Turkey. Implicit in Turkey's alignment with the West, in view of Turkey's strength and its determination to resist Soviet attack, is the possibility that an assault on Turkey might lead to a US counter-attack against the USSR. In this event Turkey might become a forward air base for US air forces and greatly increase the capabilities of US air force units operating against the USSR or against Soviet or satellite forces anywhere in the Balkan and Middle East areas. Moreover, Turkey might be able to prevent the passage of Soviet submarines and surface ships from the Black Sea through the Straits to the Mediterranean.

10. In the unlikely event that Turkey should abandon its pro-US alignment, the effect on US interests in the Near East would be extremely serious. There is little doubt that pro-Western elements, who now hold a precarious balance of influence in most of the adjacent countries, would be seriously demoralized and their influence weakened if Turkey abandoned its present alignment.

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PROBABLE TURKISH COURSES OF ACTION IN THE EVENT OF WAR

11. We believe Turkey will stubbornly resist any aggression upon its territory regardless of whether outside assistance is forthcoming. Whatever the nature of the aggression, Turkey will almost certainly appeal to the US for military assistance, to the UK and France for aid under the tri-partite treaty of 1939, and to the UN for such support as it can give.

12. In the event of a Soviet or satellite attack against Yugoslavia, Iran, or even Greece, Turkey probably would intervene on its own initiative. It would increase its vigilance on its frontiers and make every effort to avoid provoking a Soviet attack. At the same time, however, it would be prepared to participate in UN counter-measures. If the UN or the US requested the use of Turkish bases from which to institute counter-measures, Turkey would probably comply if it received a definite US commitment of aid in the event of an attack on Turkey. The Turkish attitude toward Soviet or satellite attacks in other parts of Europe and Asia would probably be similar to its attitude toward the Korean conflict: it would probably fully support UN collective security measures, but would oppose large-scale expenditure of Western resources in "police" measures on the Soviet periphery.

13. If the Korean conflict should lead to full-scale war between the US and Communist China, the Turkish reaction would be

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ambivalent. On the one hand, Turkey would be impelled to support action against the Chinese Communists by its conviction that all nations threatened by Soviet imperialism must stand together and by its desire to demonstrate fully to the US its reliability as an ally. On the other hand, the Turks would become much more concerned with their own situation vis-a-vis the USSR and would view unfavorably any greater commitment of US military strength in the Far East, unless such commitment were matched or even exceeded by expansion of US strength in the eastern Mediterranean and US guarantees to Turkey. The line of action actually adopted by Turkey would be determined largely by the Turkish Government's estimate of its security position at the moment. Turkey would, however, give diplomatic support to the US and would probably continue to provide the services of the Turkish Brigade and possibly a naval unit or two.

14. In the event of a general war in which Turkey itself was not attacked, the Turks probably would initially adopt a non-belligerent status. Nevertheless, Turkish political leaders, both government and opposition, have frequently expressed the view that Turkish neutrality in the East-West struggle in war or peace is neither advisable nor possible. Consequently, even though Turkey were not attacked, the Turks would be likely to cooperate with the West and do everything compatible with a non-belligerent status to facilitate a Western victory.

ADDITIONS